

NOTES ON THE VARIED HONEY-EATER  
(*PTILOTIS VERSICOLOR*, GOULD.)

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*Ptilotis versicolor*, North, Vict. Nat., xxi., 1905, p. 167.

(Plate v., fig. 3.)

The Varied Honey-eater was described by Gould in 1842 from a single specimen contained in a collection of bird skins from Northern Australia, and was for many years regarded as a rare species. It is an inhabitant of the coastal districts and adjacent islands of Northern and North-eastern Queensland and Southern New Guinea, and is also found on some of the intermediate islands of Torres Strait. Off the coast of North-eastern Queensland, MacGillivray obtained this species on Dunk Island, and Elsey on Albany Island. Many specimens were procured by the "Chevert" Expedition, fitted out by the late Sir William Macleay, since when it has been obtained by various collectors both in New Guinea and Australia.

Among a small collection of bird skins sent me for examination, made by Mr. Albert F. Smith, principally near Cairns, North-eastern Queensland, and the neighbourhood, was a specimen of *Ptilotis versicolor*, Gould, collected by him on one of the Frankland Islands on the 16th October, 1904. Subsequently I received a second specimen from him, shot in company with the other, also their nest and a set of two eggs taken at the same time.

The nest of *Ptilotis versicolor*, as will be seen from the accompanying plate, is an open cup-shape, and somewhat scanty structure, daylight being visible through the greater portion of the sides. Externally it is formed of fibrous rootlets, held together with plant down and spider webs, with which are intermingled a few egg-bags of spiders and their green silky covering, the inside being sparingly lined with fine pale brown rootlets and fibre, and at the bottom with a small quantity of silky-white plant-down. It is attached by the rim on one side to a leafy horizontal branch from which springs a thin twig at right angles, but this is concealed in the structure, two leaves being worked on to the side of the nest. Externally it measures three inches and three-quarters in diameter by two inches and a quarter in depth, the inner cup measuring three inches in diameter by one inch and a half in depth.

The eggs, which were in an advanced state of incubation, are two in number, oval in form somewhat pointed at the smaller end, the shell being close-grained, smooth and lustrous. They are of a uniform fleshy-buff colour, being of a slightly richer shade on the larger end, where on one specimen, with the aid of a lens, a few very minute darker dots may be seen. The eggs of this species are indistinguishable in colour from a variety of those of its close ally *Ptilotis sonora*, Gould, also from those of the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*, Latham).

Relative to taking the above nest and set of eggs, Mr. Smith has kindly supplied me with the following notes:—"This species is fairly plentiful on one of the Frankland Islands off the coast of north-eastern Queensland. It has a loud call that attracted my attention as our boat drew near the island, as something quite different to anything I had heard before, but cannot describe it at all. There is a shrub with a number of thin upright leafy twigs which grows over half the island, and it was in one of these about ten yards from the beach the nest was built. It was seven feet from the ground, and attached to thin upright twigs on one side, and the horizontal branch on the other side which remains fastened to the nest. It contained two eggs very much incubated, and while I was taking them the pair of birds perched on a tree alongside and uttered their loud cries. I brought both down with one shot without damaging either as specimens."